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## THE USE OF HEBREW IN NEW TESTAMENT STUDY.

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*The position stated—Reasons: 1. Idiomatic expression conveys habit of thought. 2. Hebraism dominant in the time of Christ. 3. The Jews superior teachers in religion. 4. Familiarity with Hebrew aids in the interpretation of New Testament rhetoric. 5. Explains the view of prophecy then accepted. 6. Throws light on the Apocalypse. 7. Accounts for the language of Christian theology. 8. Cumulative advantage in the knowledge of Hebrew words and phrases. 9. Quotations ought to be read in the original. Conclusion: Study the sources of truth.*

NOT the least advantage gained in the study of Hebrew is the special fitting with which it furnishes an exegete to teach the Christian gospel. While in the ordinary subdivision of work in theological seminaries it may be convenient to differentiate on the basis of the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures, no one must suppose that the subjects are to be studied without regard to relation. Linguistic research must be subordinated to a perception of the inspired unity in the two records, yet a knowledge of the language in which the first part was written may be important in determining the force and beauty of the unity in both parts. The study of Hebrew is necessary to a thorough and competent investigation of the New Testament.

1. Knowledge of the language of a people is highly important in becoming acquainted with them in their modes of thought and action. Words and sounds are common and trustworthy manifestations of character, condition and conception. On this fact, to some degree at least, has been based a still persistent defense of the study of both Greek and Latin in the colleges. A strong argument is thus furnished for better education in English and the literature embodied in it, and the true reason for the study of modern German and French rests somewhat on the same principle. Culture in the sacred and classical languages may well be pursued for its æsthetic value. In addition, the

knowledge of the masterpieces of production in letters, painting, sculpture, practical mechanism, or any other form of descriptive expression fills the contemplative mind with the highest and most satisfactory ideals of being and achievement. The authors of the New Testament books were all, with one possible exception, Jews. If they did not use the ancient Hebrew tongue, they were yet thoroughly imbued with the Old Testament spirit. Though they spoke in another dialect and wrote in an acquired vernacular, their idioms of thought were inherited from Abraham, Isaiah, and the psalmists, and in spite of themselves their speech revealed their origin and their cast of mind.

2. Christianity took its rise not in a period of religious depression and inactivity, as is often asserted, but at the culmination of an enthusiastic, though bigoted, Jewish faith and spirit. Ecclesiasticism was consequently prosperous, and Herod's temple was a fit and forcible expression of gorgeous splendor in elaborate ritual and regal pomp in spiritual things. The influence of the Septuagint was at its highest and the schools of the great teachers of the law had never so flourished. Even shepherds were in a frame of mind to hear the songs of angels in the night. Simeon, Zachariah, Anna, and Mary were waiting for the consolation, pondering the prophecies, eagerly greeting the signs of a better advent. Pharisaism was the embodiment of loyalty to the Hebrew idea. It at first opposed the Christ because he disappointed them in their temporal hopes, but in the spirit that originated the sect there were evidences of sympathy with the Light and the Truth, as appears in the logical outcome of the vehement agitation in Paul's mental and mortal nature. This man insisted that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and yet he is recognized as the master-theologian of the new and mighty doctrine. How can one fully comprehend Paul, unless he is familiar with Paul's point of view and the nature of the substance which reflects the light revealed in him?

3. The Jews have been preëminently superior as religious thinkers and discoverers. Even if Moses, David, or Isaiah did not write all that is ascribed to them, if the book of Job was the product of a late age, or if the Old Testament consists largely

of compilations from various unknown sources, it still remains that the seed of Abraham were unequaled in their genius for thinking and writing on matters that pertain to man's spiritual relations. Their Scriptures betoken a peculiar mental process that is far better understood when the genius of their language is comprehended. Surely the forms of utterance adopted are not to be neglected when the conceptions to be transmitted are fraught with such signal force, unparalleled fervor, and unquestionable merit.

4. A study of Hebrew will furnish excellent drill in that style of composition which is best suited to religious contemplation. Picture, metaphor, trope, artistic combination of word and phrase, copious vocabulary in moral nomenclature, spontaneity in didactic vision, the poetic instinct, freedom to change the point of view from objective to subjective, or *vice versa*, readiness to connect facts and allow the observer to draw appropriate inferences, are marked features, easily perceived in the detail of words and sentences, as well as in the very being of their authors. The ability to interpret these correctly is essential to the best understanding of the revelation which has Jesus Christ and his office as its subject. Such power is acquired only by patiently dwelling on the form and idiom of the medium through which the idea has been transmitted. There may be some dull minds that can never fully appreciate the poetic conceptions of Bible story, but if they would steadily and perseveringly apply themselves to the study of Hebrew grammar so as to be able to discriminate in the niceties of syntactic and rhetorical expression, their powers of literary interpretation would be greatly improved. Much of the cold, rigid, and obnoxious theology of past ages grows out of those views of the divine Word that do not truthfully reflect the exact condition of the author's mind. The abuse is more serious in its consequences when applied to the New Testament, which has been dissected as a corpse by the doctors. Organs and their functions have been dissevered from other vital parts, and peculiar or exceptional conditions have been treated as universal and absolute. As an illustration, many of Paul's statements have been viewed not in the light in which a Jew of his

age would be apt to take them, but rather in the sense in which a modern critic out of sympathy with Semitic taste and sentiment would use them. The truth as it is in Jesus may be entirely hidden.

5. Familiarity with the original form of prophecy will enable a reader of the evangelists and apostles to comprehend their views in regard to its meaning and fulfilment. If the Jewish opinion of the Scripture then prevailing could be kept in mind, some at least of the difficulty would be removed. Bible story, very appropriately, had come to be regarded as the embodiment of moral teaching. The historic conditions and prophetic aspirations involved wholesome principles that were capable of new and recurring applications. Old Testament literature held itself in solution amid all the thoughts and desires of the Jew, so that no incident could happen without having its counterpart in the most remarkable and comprehensive religious and political cultus ever known. The apostles, and Paul no less than the others, believed in a divine destiny for the chosen people. Messianism was wholly Jewish in its origin. The idea was not thus unfitted to control the universal mind, for narrow as the Jew was in his political affiliations, he was possessed of the thought and faith that find a response in every age and clime.

6. One part of the New Testament—the Book of Revelation—is modeled on the form of Old Testament apocalypse. This much-abused portion of Scripture is intensely Hebraistic in conception and presentation. Many of the words are Hebrew, and the allusions can only be explained by reference to previous Old Testament notions and conditions. The use of “Amen” is clearer and more appropriate when taken in its original sense. Observe also such words as “Abaddon,” “Alleluia” and the translated “El Shaddai” in the term “God Omnipotent.” The writer thinks in the manner of Ezekiel or the author of the Book of Daniel, or Hosea, in his view of Gog and Magog, of the four beasts and of Babylon the mother of harlots. His dream of the New Jerusalem is an expression of pious and lofty patriotism worthy of a real Jew enlightened by the broader view of a regenerated Christian. He uses the term “Satan” as it had long been understood.

He delights in references to the mystic numbers and constructs his sentences in accordance with the poetic model so often adopted and approved. He ingeniously protects himself from liability to civil prosecution by cabalistic terms well understood by the initiated, but an insoluble and apparently harmless mystery to those against whom his message was directed. The nature of the volume is such that an entirely satisfactory explanation of all its enigmatic forms can hardly be hoped for, but it would not have been subjected to such grossly inaccurate and outrageous applications as have been the fancy of succeeding commentators if they could have imbued themselves with the Semitic spirit and could have thoroughly understood the form and aim of Hebrew expression.

7. The masterpieces of Christian theology, as found in the epistles to the Galatians and Romans, are conceived in the atmosphere of Hebrew thinking and composition. Paul has given to the story of Eden a meaning and importance which a mind unused to Semitic formulas and canons could have never comprehended. It is probable that the moral bearing of this account would at least have been sadly obscured had not a Greek-educated Jew been inspired to fix in philosophical terms suited to modern reasoning the delicate sentiment and moral ideas expressed in such poetic and artistic fashion by the author in Genesis. It was this son of Benjamin who could find an allegory in the story of Abraham, and Hagar, and Isaac, to prove that in the world's drama the vital principles of faith and adoption are essentially and universally embodied. His arguments were addressed to those acquainted and in sympathy with the Jewish system and the law on which it had been established. The cogency of his reasoning was apprehended by those in whose minds the literary form of his thought was indigenous. It is liable to misconstruction by those who cannot interpret the idiomatic theology and creed expression of the chosen people.

8. There are in the New Testament many words and phrases whose meaning is clearer and stronger when viewed by the Hebrew scholar. The advantage of Semitic learning is cumulative on this point, and the enumeration of a few instances would

not sufficiently impress anyone who does not appreciate linguistic research. Still it may be well to note an instance or two, so that the suggestion may not seem to be fanciful. The frequent use of "and," "so," "then," "therefore," in the gospel of John, is of Hebraistic origin, and when so regarded is more easily explained. Notice also here and elsewhere the terms, "verily," "and it came to pass," "opened his mouth," "answered and said." There is some advantage in a knowledge of the meaning of proper names and the sense in which names are employed. The simplicity of construction, considered in relation to the possibilities of involved structure in the Greek, which the gospel writers used as their medium of communication, is greatly appreciated by one accustomed to the style and thinking of the Old Testament. In phrase and vocabulary the New Testament is so much like the older document that its translation into Hebrew even from the English version is not a difficult undertaking.

9. Direct quotations are made from the Old Testament. Much erroneous exposition, both in principle and effect, has resulted from a disregard of the conditions on which the later writers copied. Those who can interpret in their original setting the passages quoted will be better able to read the mind of him who uses them in a new connection, not only in the verses under consideration, but also in the other parts of his work where his general purpose is disclosed. There cannot be a much more fascinating pursuit for the theologian of linguistic taste and attainment than the comparative study of the Septuagint, from which so many of the New Testament quotations are made, and the text of the original composition which was not affected by Alexandrian thought and worship.

The study of Hebrew is in danger of being neglected because it is regarded only as the vehicle in which an obsolete system has been transmitted to later generations. To some it is nothing more than an interesting curiosity. Besides, the simplicity of the construction is such that to a student not far advanced in the genius of the language it seems as if little has been suggested more than may be derived from a common translation. It pays

to drink deep of the truth that flows from the original fountain, even though confined to its own limits, but there is invaluable advantage also to be gained by the fitting of the student to taste the riper product of the gospel that began to be preached in Jerusalem. The scientific theologian of these times will pursue his investigation to the original sources of inspired thought. He aims to know not only what a thing is, but how it came to be what it is, and thus will he contribute in making it what it is intended to be. The divine word is worthy of all our pains. If its last truths are more clearly comprehended by a thorough knowledge of the medium in which earlier revelations were conveyed, the opportunity thus to learn must be duly prized and eagerly accepted.